

A: CCC. A great many officers had to do that. Well, that wasn't too bad except they were off by themselves in woods and so on. But during that period I had this district work and then I got the assignment to the Philippines.

Q: Let's go back. We've gotten into your career some after you graduated from the Military Academy and how you decided to accept your commission in the Corps of Engineers. I found that a very interesting story because branch selection is normally a very long, thought-out process.

A: Well, I thought it out too, but I never thought about the Corps of Engineers.

Fort Brown, Texas, and Washington Barracks

Q: An awful lot of them do that. My roommate at the Military Academy made a spot decision to go to the Air Force after having planned on going to the Corps of Engineers, if he were high enough. It turned out he was high enough, but he decided to go into the Air Force. That was a spur-of-the-moment decision also. Just after commissioning you went to the 1st Engineer Regiment in Fort Brown, Texas, but you only stayed there about four months. Was that a basic training unit?

A: Oh, no, it was troop duty. We stayed there until the war was declared, the First World War. I was assigned to a regiment. I was a company officer and we built and maintained roads around, made reconnaissances and surveys, all up and down the border.

Q: Working out of Fort Brown?

A: Out of Fort Brown.

Q: You were a platoon leader then?

A: I was a platoon leader.

Q: What were your initial impressions of the Army? Prior to World War I when you graduated from the Military Academy and went down to Fort Brown, Texas, did you know at that time that you were going to make a career of the Army?

A: I was dedicated to the Army, I have been all my life. I intended to be. It [border duty] was just a wild young buck's experience. I was interested in everything I saw. I enjoyed the border. I enjoyed the work I had and the people I associated with; and after West Point it was freedom. We weren't entirely puritan about the whole business. We used to go downtown and get a bottle of liquor and come back and sit by the stove and drink it. We did make one expedition over into Mexico [for which] we could have been court martialed and kicked out of the Army at that time. The division all went on maneuvers, and I happened to be detailed for some reason to take over a searchlight platoon. That was the only searchlight platoon in the United States Army at that time. Oh, I don't know what it was for, battlefield illumination or something. Anyway, I had to take it over. So they went off on maneuvers; and "Bugs" Oliver [Lunsford E. Oliver, USMA 1913], who was the supply officer at the regiment, and there was another officer there, what the hell was he doing? Well, his name was [Hugh C.] Minton and he later became a major general in Ordnance and came in the Regular Army; he was left back.

So, one night, we decided to go to Mexico, and it was forbidden to go across the bridge. So we put on civilian clothes and we went across, and we told them we were buyers from Kansas City when we went across. When we got over there, hell, they knew all about us. By the time we arrived at Matamoros in the plaza, the band started up an American tune and all the boys and girls were parading back and forth around in circles around the square, and the band-they all stopped and played American tunes. Well, anyway, we went around and visited, oh, I don't know how many places. We went to saloons. We didn't do anything wrong. Then we went to a theater and saw a play. We didn't understand it, but it came about time to go back to Texas and damned if the bridge wasn't closed and we couldn't get across. So we went up to this hotel. Right about that time there were people being shot. During the Villa troubles, there were bandits all over the place and they were shooting up strangers on the street, and we didn't want to be found on the street. As Americans we were trying to hide our identity. So we went to this hotel. Well, we got a room, the three of us a great big room. Absolutely bare, there was a bed in it and a table and a couple of chairs. We started to go to bed at

about midnight and we pulled back the covers, I never saw as many bedbugs in one place. They were under the pillow! There wasn't room for them to get in the mattress. They were just all over the place. Well, we decided we couldn't do that. So we put the chairs on top of the table and we sat on the chairs all night long. And we had this hack driver, a Mexican boy with a pony, who was to call for us the next morning-Fedora or somebody like that. He arrived about daybreak, and we couldn't go across the main bridge at that time. So we had to go down the river and cross on a ferry and get over on the other side and then get back to Fort Brown without being identified. That was a wild night, but it was all just trying to do something you weren't supposed to do.

Q: Everybody does that.

A: It was all right.

Q: Now, is Fort Brown, is that in existence today as another post?

A: No, it has been turned over to the state. There's now a state college or something. I don't know what it is, but it was turned over to the state with all the buildings and everything else, and they opened up some sort of school there, state school. I think mostly for Mexicans.

Q: With Europe already in the war in 1916-17, do you remember the build-up for the American entry into the war, how the Army felt about it, how the public felt about it, and anything that caused changes in those feelings?

A: Oh, I don't know. I don't remember that. We were all interested in it. Of course, when I was still a cadet at West Point, we were studying the war. We had lectures on it, on [the] first years of the world war. So we were acquainted with it. At that time we went to the border. We were more interested in the border business and [Pancho] Villa and so on. We were not particularly involved on that end of the border; the activities took place over around El Paso and around that area. But we were on patrol and we watched people. We were forbidden to go across. I don't know. It took a long time to build up. [President Woodrow] Wilson had trouble

building up interest enough to get into the war. Whether he wanted to or intended to, I'm not sure.

Q: Well, Wilson was on record initially as—

A: 'Peace at any price' and all that business, and he wasn't going to do anything to stir up war; but he led us into it. I'm sure of that. I don't remember whether he—I don't think his incident was as blatant as [Franklin D.] Roosevelt's was to get us into the Second World War, but he wasn't averse to it. I don't think he had—what was it—the *Lusitania* or some ship torpedoed. We lost a lot of people. That was really the key point.

Q: Well, that built the public support that sparked the patriotism.

A: Public support—

Q: When you were studying at West Point, studying the war in Europe, was the consensus then that eventually we would get into it?

A: No, nobody—I don't know what the other people were—as cadets we weren't worried one way or the other. We were interested in it, studying, trying to find out what the war was all about. We weren't that serious; if we were going in we'd go in, that was all there was to it.

Q: How about when we did get into it? Do you think that the Army had had enough warning to properly prepare for the entry? Do you think the training was sufficient before then?

A: No, we hadn't. But we were working hard. We had nothing before we got into it. Then we started to prepare. We started at Plattsburg Camp [New York]. Well, we had started that before. Then we started to get recruits. We had the draft and training. We trained hard. We were working ten or twelve hours a day on training. Of course my regiment, my company at that time in the regiment I was in, was almost entirely volunteers. We had no general draft at that time, and they'd come in. But we started out with about, well, up, I think, we only had about 35

men after it split per company and we went up to 250. But we had all volunteers. We had nobody with experience, but we had some crackerjack men. I'll tell you this for my company. We worked like hell, and we did well. And I remember when we were at Leavenworth we had a boxing tournament, a post boxing tournament. There was nobody on the post except our regiment, and a lot of Signal Corps and a few post personnel, but we had a boxing tournament. I don't know how many classes—there were about six or seven lightweights on up to heavyweights. You know, my company won five of them. I had the damndest lot of platoon sergeants. Every platoon sergeant that I had—he had one challenge, he'd lick any man in the platoon. And they were good ones, they were crackerjacks. Just as tough, and they had been before that the misfits. Most of them had been the misfits of the Army. Most of them had spent their time in the guardhouse from AWOL [absent without leave] or what not. But they buckled down, and they turned [out] to be the best. They hadn't had an opportunity before, but when it came, they accepted the challenge. Before the war was over, I got three or four of those sergeants commissioned as officers. Oh, my first sergeant I got out of the Disciplinary Barracks [Fort Leavenworth Military Prison]; he had been a deserter from the Marine Corps.

Q: Your first sergeant?

A: He had served his time. I was hard up because I lost all my good men. They went off to start new regiments. They were commissioned. I had about three first sergeants before that, primed one right after the other, and every one of them would get an offer of a commission—go off with some new regiment. So you were down to all recruits. Well, I had this old fellow, he was a fine-looking chap. He hadn't much brains. He deserted from the Marine Corps, and he'd served his time in the Disciplinary Barracks. But he was out and I got him. He came over; he did all right. He wasn't very brainy, but he was a fine-looking soldier. He looked a perfect soldier, but he wasn't much of a soldier. But, anyway, that was the type of people we were working.

Q: All of them being volunteers, I guess most of them were motivated by the spirit to get into the war and support?

A: They were right. I didn't have any draftees at all. I think the draftees are all right. I never served with them. We were all volunteers; they had come in without being forced in.

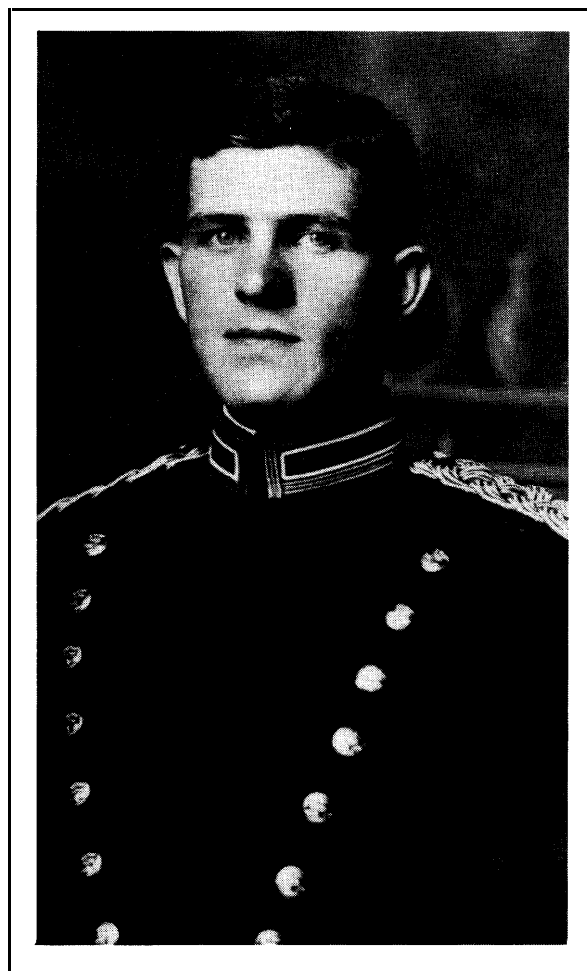
Q: Well, I guess that answers another question I had about the morale of the troops. It sounds like the morale was extremely high.

A: It was, it was tops. They would try anything. Not only that, they would lead. Yes, and follow you anyplace, anywhere. I had some good ones.

Fort Leavenworth

Q: I have that in May 1917 to March 1918 you were assigned to the 7th Engineers at Fort Leavenworth.

A: Wait a minute—those dates. I went from Brown to Washington Barracks at DC, which is now the National War College [Fort Lesley J. McNair]. See, that was the old Engineer post in those days. We only had three regiments of Engineers in the Army: the 1st, 2d, and 3d. Well, at that time battalions expanded from two companies of the old 1st Engineers to become a regiment—and we all drew lots for regimental assignment. Our regiment was assigned to form the 1st, 6th, and 7th Regiments; we were officers



William M. Hoge as an engineer lieutenant in full dress uniform.

for those three regiments. We drew lots on that and of course the choice everybody wanted was the 1st Engineers. It was the first one to go overseas but we had nothing to do with that—we just drew lots and I was assigned to the 7th Engineers. We went out to Leavenworth and a company joined us from the border. I was with B Company in the 1st when the 1st came up from the border—another company came up from the border and formed the 2d Battalion of the 7th Engineers. We formed the 1st Battalion from B Company, 1st Engineers.

Q: I see, so the 7th Engineers was actually born out of the 1st Engineers through the drawing of lots?

A: The 1st Engineers, the old 1st Engineers, formed three regiments.

France and Luxembourg

Q: That was in preparation for the war?

A: That was just after the war was declared and we went to Leavenworth, and we stayed out there and organized the 7th Engineers until we were ordered to France in March of 1918. I think we were ordered there in February. I know we were for I missed the birth of my first son. He was born in February but we were already on the way to the port of debarkation. So, I never saw him until he was a year and a half old. He was walking and talking when I came home. We went to France and the regiment was then split. Well, my company—the company I had—was assigned to the construction of the hospital at Rimaucourte, a base hospital.

Q: Rimaucourte, is that correct, sir?

A: Rimaucourte. What the hell is the name of that province? Anyway, it's up near the border. It was the Haute-Marne.

Q: The Belgium border.